

ART. VII.—*Wigton Old Church.* By W. G. COLLINGWOOD.

Read at the site, July 13th, 1927.

ST. MARY'S church at Wigton, built in 1788 and recently redecorated with much success, gives us no idea of the building which stood here for nearly 650 years. The old church, if we could see it, would be a historical treasure, and it may be worth while if we try to gather up the little that is known about it and reconstruct it in imagination, for there is no picture or description available.

As to its foundation, the *Chronicon Cumbrie*, dated by Canon James Wilson to about 1316, is not accepted as trustworthy in all details; but in this case it is corroborated by the pedigree of the Lords of Allerdale of about 1275 (*St. Bees Register*, 531), which attributes it to Odard, first lord of Wigton and sheriff in 1130-31. Nicolson and Burn, writing before it was demolished, said that it seemed never to have been rebuilt since Odard's time; that is to say, it was a nearly untouched relic of the earlier part of the twelfth century—not without additions, as we shall see, but preserving its ancient character, like Over Denton and Warwick.

In Odard's time, Wigton was on the edge of Allerdale forest, just north of the road which formed the boundary and in land put in regard by Henry II (F. H. M. Parker, these *Transactions*, N.S., v, 35, 45, 49). It was therefore a rather uncivilised place, inhabited chiefly by swineherds and woodcutters and the king's deer; and yet there was some little centre of cultivation here, or it would not have been chosen as the headquarters of a barony. The people were nearly certainly of Norse descent. This we infer, from the place-name which is identical, in early spelling, with that of Wigtown in Galloway; and as this last was

in a non-Anglian district, the names of both must be derived from Norse, rather than Anglian, founders. They were probably named or nicknamed Viggi,* meaning perhaps a bull, and the settlement here was most likely made in the tenth century and before 950—that is, before the Norse settlers brought with them Celtic Christianity and built churches, as they seem to have done at Beckermeth, Bridekirk, Brigham and elsewhere. If Viggi had been a Christian and built a church, we should find traces of it in monuments such as tenth-century cross-fragments. Nor was there any castle, then or later, at Wigton. The unwary reader might infer from the index to Chancellor Prescott's *Wetherhal* that there was such a thing; but this reference (*Wetherhal*, 156, 525) means Wigtown in Galloway, where we lately saw the site of the castle. No fort was needed here in the tenth or twelfth century; the land was at peace, rude as the people were, until the Edwardian wars.

Odard had his church built rather cheaply of stones carried from the Roman fort of Old Carlisle: Kirkbride and Over Denton churches are examples of the same economy; and in pulling down the old fabric several carved and inscribed stones were discovered. Two of these were Roman tombstones, used for the foundations, and they are described by Mr. R. G. Collingwood, thus:—

Tombstone found c. 1788 under the wall of Wigton church, now at Lowther Castle.

D	M	' In memory of Amatius Ingenuus aged 60;
AMATIVS		[so and so erected this] tomb.' The stone
INGENVVS		is broken and the end of the inscription lost.
ANNORVM		Hutchinson, <i>Cumberland</i> , vol. ii, p. 410, no.
LX TVMVLVM	20.	Lysons, <i>Cumberland</i> , p. 160. CIL. vii,
.		354.

* In the earliest form, Wiggeton (Pipe Roll, 1163), the first vowel is short, and the name therefore cannot be from Vígfúss, in which the *i* is long; so also in the O.E. wig, war; which leads us to infer Vigga-tún, the homestead of Viggi, as the original form.

Tombstone found c. 1788, under the tower of Wigton church and re-buried after being copied. The text is only known from Hutchinson (*Cumberland*, vol ii, p. 410, no. 19), who has evidently copied it wrong in many particulars. The stone is broken and the beginning of the inscription lost; the remaining text begins 'aged 44,' and apparently goes on to say that the deceased's son Aemilius . . . and his wife (*coniux*) had this stone erected (*ponendum curaverunt*). CIL. vii, 356, from Hutchinson.

Mr. R. G. Collingwood has also described the figure now built into the vicarage and illustrated in these *Transactions* N.S., xxv, 378, as 'perhaps a local Celtic deity,' no doubt from Old Carlisle. This stone measures 35 by 12 inches, the figure itself about 26 inches tall.

Hutchinson, writing not long after the demolition, said "on the *facia* of the north front of the old church, almost covered with grass, we discovered a sculpture on a stone about 18 inches long, in relief, like the figure of a Victory or one of the Genii; but it lay sideways, and so buried in soil and filled with moss, that it would have taken much labour to have opened it out and cleaned it." Hence some doubt if this figure is the same. Another Roman stone at the vicarage is a block of about 10 inches each way, bearing a kind of dolphin in relief.

When Bishop Nicolson came here in 1703, July 7th, he noticed that "under the Eaves of the North side both of the Church and Quire, are a deal of Antique Figures: which have occasion'd a Tradition that these Stones were brought from the Ruins of Old Carlisle. No such thing," he added: meaning that these gargoyles were not Roman. And as they went round the north side only, we get a hint that the south side had been altered. Now in 1788, "under one of the inside pillars," was found a stone inscribed in black letter—

✠ orate pro Geor
gio de kyrkbryde

which must have been built in as a foundation when the "inside pillars" were set up. That is to say, the original little nave of the twelfth century was found to be not enough for the increased congregation, and a south aisle was added, with pillars in the place of the old south wall. In pre-Reformation times a large congregation was not expected, but after the Reformation people were required to go to church; and this suggests a sixteenth century enlargement. The only George de Kirkbride we know, died in 1511 (Mr. T. H. B. Graham, these *Trans.*, N.S., xv, 63), and if this was his tombstone, desecrated when the old order had passed away, we seem to get at a Tudor rebuilding on the south side, doing away with the ancient gargoyles. There are some pillars from the church at Mr. Hill's joiner's shop in the town; not very large, and yet the whole church seems to have been on a small scale, like the early churches of Over Denton and Warwick.

Bishop Nicolson noticed the "square steeple" (we should call it a tower), 'well leaded,' and with two small bells. This may have been fairly early, as one of the Roman stones was found beneath it, though that does not fix the date. It is possible that we get the date of this tower as a fortified tower (which adds to the list of fortress-churches in Cumberland), in an extract from Close Rolls, March 8, 1374-5:—

Order to remove the king's hand and not to meddle with the church of Wygdon and the fruits and profits thereof, delivering it without delay to the abbot of Holm Cultram . . . as lately the king ordered the escheator to certify in Chancery under his seal, touching the annual value . . . desiring to know the cause whereof the Exchequer took the same into his own hand; and he certified that he found by inquisition . . . that without the king's licence, parcel of the said church had been crenellated for defence . . .

The king 'reckoned the cause insufficient' and let it

stand; but this was about the time when the churches of Burgh-by-Sands and Newton Arlosh were fortified, both of them, like Wigton, by Holm Cultram Abbey.

The interior was 'melancholy and gloomy,' they said before rebuilding. No doubt the windows were small as in other twelfth century churches, and light to read your hymnbook was not wanted by a medieval congregation. But the floor was flagged, which means something better than many others, and Bishop Nicolson found it all 'in tolerable condition' except that school was kept in the church. He proposed moving the school to a building in the corner of the churchyard, used as Sir Henry Fletcher's proctor's office: and the 'good old cupboard' in which the boys kept their spare books he advised to be used for the little library given by Bishop Oley.

"In the Quire," he said, "are three seats, so large as to fill up most of the Space below the Rails," namely those of Sir Henry Fletcher, Mr. Dalston (or rather the then owners of Oulton—written 'Oughton') and of Gawin Chambers, erected in 1667. And on the north entrance into the Quire was the brass to Colonel Thomas Barwise, died December 15th, 1648, aged 27, with quaint verses ending—"And, dyeing Colonel, lives crowned sure." The play upon words is not obvious, but it meant that being a Colonel or 'curnel,' popularly supposed to mean someone crowned, from *corona* (and not as it really was, commander of a *column* of troops) he was sure to be crowned in heaven as on earth.

One other monument the Bishop copied from the churchyard, that of a vicar, "who, a good while before his death, got the following Epitaph (all, excepting y^e date of his death, of his own composition) engraven on the stone":—

Thomas Warcup prepar'd this stone
To mind him oft of his best home.
Little but sin and misery here,
Till we be carry'd on our beere.

And so on, with his death in 1653. This disposes of the

story told by Hutchinson that after the Restoration [*i.e.* 1660] he returned to his cure, and finding that meat was sold of a Sunday at the church door and that churchgoers actually hung the joints over the backs of their seats he walked all the way to London and persuaded the king to grant a market on Tuesdays. It is an old story, this of the butchers' market on Sundays; told of Crosthwaite in 1300, and perhaps a pre-Reformation custom in country places where churchgoing was the best chance of seeing one's neighbours for all purposes.

One is glad to find that in 1704 'the Minister's House was in good Repair,' as Bishop Nicolson said, and the vicar, Mr. Geddes, was 'a conscientious, good man.' But his salary was only £17 6s. 8d., with 13s. 4d. from his tenant. He got tithes of hay worth 40s. a year, and tithe pigs: but this was no better than at the Reformation when John Gregyille got £17 19s. 9½d., and not much more than under Edward II, when the figure was £13 6s. 8d. The value of the living under Pope Nicholas in 1292 had been £30, but that was before the Edwardian wars and the Scottish raids. The church was endowed with a house and 10 acres in Kirkland, whence the name; and there was one acre in Wigton, perhaps that granted by Margaret de Wigton with the advowson of the church to Holm Cultram abbey in 1332 or shortly before the death (1334) of her husband Sir John Gernon. Dr. Magrath, in describing the great lawsuit by which Margaret won her inheritance (these *Transactions* N.S. xix, 53) infers that this grant was in reward for the abbot's help in her cause; Canon Wilson said (*V.C.H. Cumbd.*, ii, 164) that it was in consideration of losses by the Scots raids. But in return, the abbey had to supply four monks to celebrate divine offices daily in the church at Holm Cultram, and to found a chantry of two secular chaplains to do the same at Wigton. At the Dissolution, James Belle and William Broune were these chaplains, each receiving £5 6s. 8d. a

year from the abbey. The chantry is said to have been of St. Katherine (*V.C.H. Cumbd.*, ii, 55) and there had been also a free chapel founded by ancestors of the Earl of Northumberland, but then decayed.

The connexion of the earl with Wigton was through Henry Percy's marriage with Matilda, heiress of the Lucies. In her settlement of 1335 the hospital of St. Leonard is mentioned (*Feet of Fines*) and it lasted to the Dissolution, when George Lancaster was chaplain at a salary of £2. There can be no doubt it was at the Spital, though some difficulty has arisen from the notice in the register of Holm Cultram of land of the Hospital of Jerusalem on the east side of Waverton, in a charter of Lambert son of Gillestephen, who may be the Lambert of Waverton, named in Pipe Rolls, 1232-54. This however was three miles away from the Spital, and the land of the Hospitallers of Jerusalem was not the same as that of St. Leonard, although it appears to be so regarded by Canon Wilson (*V.C.H. Cumbd.*, ii, 204).

Another hospital is much later; built, according to the tablet quoted by Nicolson and Burn, in 1723 for six indigent widows of Protestant beneficed clergymen, under the will of the Rev. John Thomlinson of Rothbury, Northd. He also was the initiator of the Grammar School, built about 1730. Old documents in the church chest may throw further light on the later history of the church; and as to the town, we may add briefly that the parish pump, celebrated by Dickens as the centre of Wigton's inactivities, is now, with the old lamp-post, in the public park. And as a set-off to Dickens and his not too complimentary references we may quote Hutchinson, who wrote in 1794, 'The contagion of luxury has penetrated into this parish; but, it is to be observed, that the rage for spirituous liquors is less than it was ten years ago; the peasantry are better informed than formerly, and the love of liberty is increasing with the increase of morality.'